

THE STUDY OF MAN

THE SCIENCE OF "KREMLINOLOGY"

Conference on Changes in Soviet Society

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THE recent meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party concluded its deliberations on June 29, 1957. The announcement five days later that Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich, "to whom D. Shepilov adhered," had been unceremoniously fired from their ministerial posts, deprived of their membership in the presidium, and denounced as the black sheep of the party, came as an ironical footnote to a "Conference on Changes in Soviet Society" which had concluded its own deliberations the day before the Central Committee. The Conference—lasting from the 24th to the 28th of June and organized under the auspices of St. Antony's College, Oxford, England in association with the Congress for Cultural Freedom—brought together historians, sociologists, journalists, and men of letters, all of them close students of Soviet affairs, from Europe, Asia, and America. The object of the assembly was to examine what changes had taken place in Soviet society and in the relations of Russia with the non-Communist world since the death of Stalin.

The first papers presented served to plunge the Conference straight into discussion of

THE shake-up in the Kremlin this past June was in preparation at the very moment that the Oxford Conference on Changes in Soviet Society was debating the significance of what had been going on in Russia since Stalin's death. ISABEL DE MADARIAGA, a graduate of the University of London and an assistant editor of its *Slavonic and East European Review*, reports on the Conference, which brought together scholars from many countries to discuss such matters as the nature of totalitarianism and the future course of Soviet society.

what may well prove to be the fundamental problem of our time—the nature of Soviet totalitarianism. Professor Merle Fainsod of Harvard submitted a dispassionate analysis of the new trends within Soviet society, written with that coolness of judgment which characterizes all his work. Bertram D. Wolfe, in a paper subsequently published in the August issue of *COMMENTARY*, brought the Conference up short with his stern warning against a too easy belief that a totalitarian system such as that of Russia was likely to suffer any fundamental change. It would not be fair to say that Professor Fainsod and Mr. Wolfe stood at opposite poles. On many points (for example, their analysis of the changes in the balance of power between various elements in the Soviet system) they were in agreement. The difference between them was basically a matter of approach.

Mr. Wolfe surveyed the Soviet system in its historical setting, as one more example of a type of despotism which could endure for centuries—a despotism which differed from the Russian autocracy or from Byzantium in that it was not conservative but forward-looking, engaged in a constant process of social engineering designed to keep human society atomized, disorganized, and hence unable ever to present any resistance to the state. This type of political structure was incapable of evolution into a constitutional regime on modern Western lines. The signs of relaxation of control, the abandonment and even condemnation of some of the features of Stalin's rule were merely superficial concessions to keep the people quiet while the crisis over succession to Stalin worked itself out. Though Mr. Wolfe conceded that there had been a change of

atmosphere in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death, his main purpose was to warn wishful thinkers against the danger of confusing a temporary retreat on the totalitarian front with a change in the structure of power.

Professor Fainsod, on the other hand, was more concerned with the analysis of changes which have taken place or may be expected to take place within the existing Soviet society, and which might eventually lead to a modification of its structure. But though he admitted that such alterations might occur, he saw as yet no evidence that the forces for change were strong enough, organized enough, or even conscious enough of a definite purpose to warrant any optimism on the part of the Western observer.

Professor Raymond Aron of the Sorbonne in his turn viewed this same problem of the pressures working for changes in Soviet society from a different angle. He dealt not with the demands of particular classes for material improvements, but with the influence which the requirements of an expanding industrial civilization can exercise on the totalitarian political structure. Professor Aron denied that the development of productive forces must inevitably pave the way for democracy. Unlike Mr. Wolfe, however, he also denied that a totalitarian regime is invulnerable to the action of strictly economic factors. But then Professor Aron's definition of totalitarianism differed from Mr. Wolfe's. He held that "totalitarianism is an aspect or a group of features of a political regime, though it is not possible to assert that any regime is as such totalitarian in essence." Nevertheless, though the regime might undergo certain modifications as a result of the general rise in culture which follows on the expansion of productive forces, and though economic progress must lead to a more rational system of controlling economic life, the foundations of Soviet society were not, in Professor Aron's opinion, being destroyed by the success of industrialization. Would this economically more rational society lose its ideological fervor sufficiently to evolve in the direction of a free society? Here Professor Aron was frankly pessimistic. Though the Soviet system might at a pinch allow the emergence of specific "freedoms," it could not allow the development of freedom in general without undermining its central *raison d'être*.

The crux of the issue between Mr. Wolfe and Professor Aron lay of course in their re-

spective definitions of totalitarianism. Mr. Wolfe expressed the belief that modern Western absolutism was never strictly totalitarian (that is, the state was not co-extensive with society) and hence it could not prevent the gradual development of social forces (particularly the bourgeoisie) anxious to break out of the absolutist straitjacket and establish their own political power. But in the perspective of world history, modern Western absolutism was the exception and the enduring despotisms of the East (of which Karl A. Wittfogel has recently published a penetrating study, *Oriental Despotism*) the rule, and it was by this rule that Mr. Wolfe asserted the Soviet Union should be judged.

THERE are of course trends and pressures in Soviet society which in a democracy would undoubtedly find an outlet through the electoral machinery. It is fair to assume, for example, that the "state bourgeoisie" (as Professor Hugh Seton-Watson of London calls that amorphous middle group in the Soviet Union) would in a free society press for the political consolidation of its economic status. But as matters stand, such trends can only exercise influence in devious and intangible ways—in fact they may serve more as warnings to the regime of where the danger lies than as indications of the aims which the government ought to pursue in order to obtain popular approval. There is much to be said for Mr. Wolfe's refusal to be deceived by the so-called liberalization which has accompanied the struggle for power in the Kremlin, and for his insistence that in spite of the rise in the standard of living, the decline in the power of the police, and the ostentatious proclamation of a new legality, all the essential features of the regime remain unchanged.

Professor Aron, though he would not risk the assertion that fundamental changes had actually taken place, would yet not admit that the Russian regime was incapable of evolution. He accused some supporters of Mr. Wolfe of being Bolsheviks in reverse—political instead of economic determinists. Professor Alex Inkeles of Harvard came down wholeheartedly on the side of evolution, supported with perhaps some hesitation by Professor Frederick Barghoorn of Yale. Professor Inkeles's views were based on his experience of intensive questioning of Soviet refugees and the sociological interpretation of the resulting material. For him, there

was a possibility that the Soviet system might prove to be something quite new, to the analysis of which historical precedent would be little help. The discussion revealed a real difference of approach between historians and sociologists. Both may be necessary to throw light on the key problem in Russia: whether the will of the Communist party can prevail over pressure from below and force the masses to remain atomized and unorganized, or whether the pressures from below will eventually prove strong enough to relegate the Communist party to an adjunct of the government.

Nevertheless, there is a touch of unreality in a theoretical assessment of the possibility of evolution in Soviet Russia. The trouble is that the average Westerner finds it difficult to put himself in the place of his opposite number behind the Iron Curtain. He tends inevitably to judge human beings in the Soviet orbit by the assumptions which govern life in a democratic context, and he has no imaginative grasp of a world where every conscious act or thought may suddenly become an acceptance or a negation of the system.

This is particularly applicable to the situation of the Soviet intellectual. Mr. Isaiah Berlin (Oxford), in one of his sparkling interjections, described the Soviet intellectuals (as distinct from the intellectual party hacks) as mainly worried about their own creative freedom, and lacking in any coherent ideology of opposition. But he was strongly taken to task by Dr. G. Katkov, who demanded respect for people whose least gesture of nonconformity was in itself a political demonstration. The sedate academic gathering was on this one single occasion moved to applause. In conditions undreamed of by the intellectuals of the free world, their Soviet counterparts are compelled to seek out every chink in the totalitarian armor in order to make their protest felt. Mr. Wolfe remarked on the resonance of such titles as Ehrenburg's *The Thaw* or Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*, which echo throughout the intellectual world and far beyond, irrespective of the literary value of these works. Professor Richard Pipes (Harvard) thought that the moral fervor and seriousness of purpose which distinguished the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century had not entirely disappeared, and many examples were quoted of the ingenuity with which the Soviet historian or man of letters—under a far more stringent control of intellectual life than was

known even in the darkest days of Nicholas I—will use Aesopian language to express his real meaning.

Over all these speculations there hovered the shadow of Hungary, and by no means the least valuable contributions to the Conference came from Mr. Paloczi-Horvath. With the authority of a living witness he spoke of the upheaval which takes place in human beings when a revolution occurs. A revolution acts as a catalyst, forcing all who are actively involved to make a constantly renewed decision: am I for or against what is happening now? In Hungary, the intelligentsia, however critical in its heart of many features of the regime, had neither expected nor desired a revolution. Yet when it arrived, they became its leaders. Who can foresee at what point a man ceases to act in terms of class interest, and is overwhelmed by the urge to act in the interests of his fellow human beings? Of course the situation in Russia is basically different from that of Hungary, and revolution, if it happens, will not be put down by the armed forces of another power. The Russians will work out their own destiny. But, as in Hungary before October 1956, Russian behavior today is no guide to what it will be if the regime begins to show serious signs of weakness.

BOTH Mr. G. F. Hudson (Oxford) and Mr. A. D. Gorwala (India) approached the problem of Russian relations with the non-Communist world from the angle of Eastern and Western attitudes to the Soviet Union; they had less to say about Russia's own policy. Mr. Hudson's analysis of Soviet-Western tensions was bold and penetrating, but the resulting discussion was disappointing, for the Conference had not met to discuss Western policy toward Russia. That Russia would expand her sphere of influence wherever she could do so without danger to herself was an axiom accepted by all. But when it came to the question of what Western policy should be in face of the menace of H-bomb warfare, every shade of opinion was expressed. Mr. Hudson warned the West against exclusive reliance on the H-bomb deterrent, for democracies might well lack the nerve to be the first to use the bomb if the time came. Professor Aron placed his trust in what he described as the unspoken agreement between the U.S. and the USSR to avoid war and leave all the troublesome conflicts unsolved. Professor Seton-Watson and

Mr. Richard Lowenthal (London *Observer*) advocated that the West pursue a bold diplomatic offensive in the interval before Russia develops the intercontinental guided missile. But Russian policy was in no way illuminated by the discussion, which served only to reproduce on a reduced scale the bewildering diversity of aim and opinion prevalent at higher levels in the West.

The discussion on Russia and the East was more fruitful if only because here the Conference reverted to the question of Communism. Where does the fascination of Communism for the Eastern mind lie? Both Mr. Gorwala and Professor M. Inoki (Japan) speculated on the possibility that the more sophisticated Chinese brand of Communism would displace the Russian variety, at least in the sphere of ideological leadership if not of organizational control. Professor Inoki carried the idea a stage further with his suggestion that though Mao might be a staunch Communist, there were two essentially Western aspects of Marxism—its militant atheism and its revolutionary eschatology—which had not struck root in China. Communism as a *Weltanschauung*, he thought, belongs mainly to countries which have known organized Christianity.

It is certainly the case that what attracts the nations of the East to Communism are ideas associated more closely with Lenin than with Marx—principally emancipation from colonial rule and the policy of “primitive accumulation” of capital in the economic field. Marxism-Leninism is no longer a political superstructure on an economic base, but a technique for hastening the industrial progress of underdeveloped countries, a method of seizing and maintaining power to force through an economic revolution in more or less peasant societies.

Professor Inoki and Professor Seton-Watson pointed to the significant exception of Japan to this pattern of Eastern development. Japan had followed a political evolution similar to that of the Western European nations: from feudalism through absolute monarchy to constitutionalism and an industrial revolution. At the same time Japan had bridged the educational gap between the haves and the have-nots and welded its people into a cultural unity. Pro-Communism in Japan was in many ways the product of guilt feelings toward China; in other respects Japan's attitude toward Communism rather closely paralleled that of the Western nations. India, as the Indian representatives

at the Conference duly pointed out, stands forth as an Asiatic nation which successfully established a constitutional democracy on the ruins of colonialism. But India served a long apprenticeship to Western thought. The fact that Indian neutralism has shown itself more lenient in judging the sins of Communism than in judging those of the West can be explained on good historical grounds.

IN TWO argumentative sessions the Conference attempted to assess the merits of the somewhat exotic techniques which political scientists have been forced to use in trying to determine the future course of Russia. In an exhaustive analysis, belied by its whimsical title, “Ten Theories in Search of Reality,” Mr. Daniel Bell (Columbia) surveyed the wide range of interpretative theories which have been applied to the Soviet Union—from the sociological to the anthropological (questionnaires to “diaperology”), from the historical to the psychoanalytical—and many of these theories wilted under critical scrutiny. Nearly everyone present at the Conference had at some time or other employed one or more of these techniques, for instance “Kremlin-astronomy” (as distinct from the “Kremlin-astrology” of the popular journals—the phrase is Dr. Boris Meissner's). But though Kremlinology (to give this science its more usual title) can assist in interpreting trends in Soviet policy, can even show, usually after the event, the machinery by which an internal coup has been perpetrated, can it really serve to forecast the likelihood of major changes in the political structure? No one, it must be said, had any inkling of the momentous decisions which were at that very moment being reached by the Central Committee of the CPSU in Moscow. None of the techniques described by Mr. Bell can bridge the gap between the objective realities of politics and economics and the will of the Communist leadership. At most an estimate of probabilities can be made.

Moreover, as Dr. Katkov argued, how can the validity of such theories be tested? Does the Bolshevik will to power really explain the insanity of the purges? Can a strictly Marxist interpretation of the October revolution account for the part played by the large German funds at Lenin's disposal when he engineered his coup? Is there not something to be said for Mr. Leonard B. Schapiro's insistence on the study of the history of Russian Communism

as the key to understanding the past and the only basis for predicting the future—a study rendered all the more necessary by the systematic falsification and suppression of evidence by the Russians themselves?

Whereas Mr. Wolfe had dwelt on the recuperative powers of the dictatorships, Professor Seton-Watson, in the final session of the Conference, offered some hope for the West by his insistence on the solidity of the state in modern constitutional nations. In no single case in the West had Communism achieved power by a mass revolution from below; even in Yugoslavia, where Communism was not introduced by the Red Army, it came to power only after the state had already been smashed by defeat in war. The workers in the West were in the main no longer revolutionary; the danger for Western constitutional states lay rather in the coup d'état, the seizure of the citadel of power from within. In the Soviet Union the position was very different. Despite its name, the USSR was not a workers' state, and the divergence between myth and reality could well generate the kind of tension that would lead the workers at least to a revolutionary frame of mind. But if economic security were once granted to them as a grace from above, was there any guarantee that they would be inspired to fight for political rights as well?

Though Mr. Paloczi-Horvath might argue that all the elements which go to make a revolutionary situation exist in the Soviet orbit to a greater or lesser degree, Professor Fainsod's view that piecemeal concessions could stifle revolutionary ardor is convincing. May it not be that the day of the successful revolt of the people is now over for good? There are certain facts that suggest this conclusion. The West seems to be safe, while the East is becoming less vulnerable to revolution from below, as the example of the successful modernization of Eastern states like India, Japan, and Iraq along non-Communist lines makes itself felt.

THIS brings us to one significant omission in the program of discussion at the Oxford Conference—the role of the armed forces in a totalitarian society. The fate of revolutions depends on the attitude of the private soldier. If he is willing to obey the orders of his officers and to fire on his brothers, the workers and the peasants, no revolution from below can hope to succeed. As long as the

Communist party leadership and the armed forces are united in a common purpose, they can evidently ignore all the demands of the state bourgeoisie for increased legality, the yearning of the intellectuals for a freer and nobler life, even the objective requirements of an expanding economy. In fact neither social pressures for material improvements, nor idealistic elaborations of political programs à la Kronstadt by the ex-elite of the concentration camps can achieve anything against this combination of will and power.

Even if we accept Mr. Wolfe's thesis that there can be no evolution in Russia without revolution, rather than Professor Fainsod's more cautious "*plus c'est la même chose plus ça change*," we can still say that at least one basic change in Soviet structure seems to have taken place since the death of Stalin. This change does not affect the relations of the government with the people, but it has introduced a new element into the balance of power at the top. The police was under Stalin's immediate control, and every other institution—the party, the army, the bureaucracy—was subject to his capricious dictates. The army as an independent institution did not exist; it had been pulverized by the purges, and its status in the life of the nation was comparatively insignificant. After the war, the army which had so magnificently proved itself and raised its prestige immeasurably in the eyes of a basically militaristic nation, was nevertheless relegated to a secondary role, and it continued to be watched, penetrated, and controlled by the police.

Now, since Stalin's death, the status of the police has been depressed and that of the army has risen. Though army officers are also party members, the army may now be strong enough to be able to choose in given circumstances whether it will be guided by army loyalties or by party loyalties. The role played by Zhukov in recent years, and particularly in connection with the expulsion of the three black sheep from their party and government posts, shows that the dominant group in the party does not regard the army as an instrument but as an ally. In this connection one recalls the maxim of Machiavelli on the dangers of allying oneself with a stronger party. The army may now be in a position to develop into an institution independent of, and possibly rival to, the Communist party, and it possesses the sheer material power without which

no government can govern. There is no sign as yet of a rift between the army and the party—but the new status of the army is bound to set up a strain which is well worth the careful observation of the expert on Soviet affairs.

Of course there was much else that the Oxford Conference left untouched. Economic and industrial policy as subjects in their own right were omitted from the program. The outlook and demands of the workers, the response of the peasants to the new agricultural policy, the reaction of the managerial bureaucracy to the decentralization of industry were not discussed. Other omissions were the likelihood of unrest in the national minorities, and the Soviet attitude toward the Jews.

The Conference cannot really be said to have reached any conclusions about anything. It did, however, serve to refresh and reinvigorate the study of Soviet affairs by bringing together from the four points of the compass scholars of distinction, and enabling them to test the value of the aims and methods of their various disciplines. Many side issues to develop which the formal program gave no time were pursued and elaborated by groups in the monastic corridors of St. Antony's College. Perhaps the greatest merit of the gathering was the remarkable proof it gave of the seriousness of purpose and the integrity of thought which united the participants in pursuit of a common aim—to come to grips with the specter which is haunting Europe.